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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC-05214-87

31 December 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM: [REDACTED]
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for NESA

SUBJECT: NESA Warning and Forecast Report, 17 December 1987

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Israel/Syria/Lebanon: Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop: The first issue discussed concerned the Palestinian hang glider attack and the absence, to date, of an Israeli response. CIA led the discussion with the following comments:

Tel Aviv has publicly blamed Syria for the PFLP-GC hang glider attack on a northern Israeli military garrison in late November--which was the bloodiest attack inside Israel since the 1982 invasion. Syria's complicity in the attack and their rather gleeful recital about the extent of their involvement clearly contributes to an Israeli desire to punish Syria as well as the Palestinians. CIA believes a strong Israeli response--short of attacking Syria--is likely both to maintain Israeli public morale while avenging Israeli losses, and to send a strong signal to Syria. Uncertainty about when and where the Israelis will retaliate for last month's attack continues to unnerve the potential targets, such as the PFLP-GC and Syrian forces in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, particularly since the US-Soviet summit.

In CIA's view the most likely Israeli response will be airstrikes against PFLP-GC bases in the Bekaa Valley--particularly those which are ideally situated adjacent to Syrian forces.

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[REDACTED] An attack on Palestinian camps in Syria [REDACTED] is a far less likely alternative because of the greater risk to Israeli aircraft from the dense Syrian Sam coverage and fears of increasing tensions with Syria. Whatever retaliation the Israelis ultimately decide on, CIA believes it will not involve ground troops in Lebanon, which would risk high casualties and direct engagement with Syrian forces. The most lucrative targets associated with the PFLP-GC are located well behind Syrian lines in Lebanon.

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Israel's lengthy delay in retaliating for the glider attack is probably related to three key factors--

-- They lack a suitable target. [REDACTED]

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-- The Israeli delay is consistent with Tel Aviv's policy of keeping terrorists off balance. Israel will respond, but only when it chooses to do so, not when it is expected.

-- The delay may have, at least initially, stemmed from an internal political division with the National unity government on how to respond to the Syrian-abetted operation. Likud leaders such as Prime Minister Shamir and Commerce Minister Ariel Sharon almost certainly favored massive attacks on Palestinian facilities in Lebanon and possibly also in Syria. Labor leaders like Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Peres and Defense Minister Rabin undoubtedly opposed striking Palestinian bases in Syria and have thus far succeeded in fending off calls for broad military retaliation.

SOUTH LEBANON--ISRAELI SECURITY ZONE

Turning to Israeli security concerns in south Lebanon, in general, and the security zone, in particular, we believe the Israelis--particularly in light of the PFLP-GC attack--will be even more convinced than ever that a withdrawal of Israeli forces now would only encourage attacks against settlements in northern Israel. Lacking a reliable guarantor for the security of northern Israel, no Israeli leader will scrap the security zone concept. Because no such guarantor is likely to emerge--despite recent indications of contacts between Tel Aviv and Amal--the Israelis are likely to maintain their presence in southern Lebanon for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the Israeli public, although shaken by the success of the glider attack and the unprofessional response by the military unit involved, strongly supports the security zone as Israel's only viable option.

The success of the glider attack has only served to strengthen Israel's resolve to ensure such events are not repeated. The unusual and, by Israeli standards, severe disciplinary action undertaken by the military against Nahal personnel certainly reflects a commitment by Israel to the zone and toward maintenance of an effective military deterrent, while also indicating that Tel Aviv's military and political leadership accepts that the border cannot be 100% hermetically sealed. In his statement to the Knesset, following the glider attack, Rabin stressed that the residents of northern Israel are enjoying a level of security unknown prior to the 1982 invasion, and that security is a direct result of the security zone policy. In his

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view, the zone has "passed the test" and cited that not a single Israeli civilian has been killed as a result of a cross-border raid since its implementation.

The Israelis are generally satisfied with the situation in the zone, despite the daily hit and run attacks by Lebanese guerrillas. Both the Israelis and outside observers such as UNIFIL agree that the zone, since May, has been relatively quiet, but prospects for an end to hostilities or an Israeli withdrawal are bleak. The bottom line for the Israelis is that Lebanon and events in the zone no longer occupy the front pages of the daily newspaper in Tel Aviv and that alone contributes to Israel's belief that while far from an ideal solution, the strategy thus far has been successful and served a useful purpose.

From the Syrian perspective, the key issue arising from the hang glider incident is how much and what type of retaliation it will provoke from Israel. Assad, who badly needs to assert Syria's role as the vanguard in a renewed anti-Israeli struggle, will be watching closely for a change in the size or nature of the inevitable. Israeli response in order to develop a gauge of his limits. If such attacks provoke only selective retaliation, Assad may calculate they are worth the risks. Assad is ill equipped, however, to deal with an escalatory spiral and certainly does not want a prolonged crisis that could exacerbate his existing problems in supplying his military with essentials such as spare parts and ammunition.

- Syria will certainly respond to air attacks on Syrian positions. We are uncertain how Syria would respond to attacks near Syrian positions or along the border. If Israeli attacks are in the Bekaa, Syria might try to absorb the blows without provoking Israel (through a shootdown) into taking out the whole air defense system in Lebanon and along the Syrian border. (DIA believes Syria probably would not fire if the attacks were on Palestinian positions only. Assad does not want a conflict and he does not want to lose his SAMs.)

Warning Issues: Israel will, at some point, retaliate and the community cannot be certain whether this will spark an escalatory spiral. Although the situation is tense, there may be more stability than there appears, given both sides' desire to avoid a major conflict or even prolonged tensions. The hang glider episode illustrates, however, why conflict cannot be ruled out over the next several years, even though both sides don't want conflict. If the hang glider had landed in an Israeli town or kibbutz or if the infiltrator had ambushed a civilian bus, for example, the government of Israel would have had virtually no choice but to launch a massive retaliation--probably into Syria proper.

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(Note: Next month we will discuss the effect of the rioting in the occupied territories and its effects on regional issues and Israeli politics.

Bangladesh: Possible scenarios and their Implications: Mary Shoemaker of State/INR led the discussion of the political situation in Bangladesh. She began by saying that in spite of opposition statements to the contrary, she believed it conceivable that Ershad's talks with the opposition could produce results in resolving the current stalemate. Second, although the implications for the regional interest of the United States are not profound, the stalemate does matter for Bangladesh:

- It is not good for the economy. For example, it is disrupting transportation and causing losses to the garment industry.
- It hurts Bangladesh's efforts to maintain foreign aid levels.

Finally, although the opposition's efforts are intermittent and not that damaging, they are capable of keeping them up for a while.

The key question is what the Army's leadership will do. Specifically, at what point will they decide that the opposition will never make a deal and that they cannot tolerate the stalemate. The Army is reluctant to do this, however, and still views Ershad as its chosen leader. In the absence of a deal with the opposition, there are three scenarios:

- Ershad resigns and is replaced by another Officer chosen by the Army.
- Ershad remains in power but imposes martial law.
- Ershad is pushed aside by the Army.

There is some disagreement about whether Ershad would be willing and whether the Army would allow him to rule under martial law. The likely successor is, however, loyal to Ershad and in poor health. Most of all the Army does not want to destroy its hard-earned cohesion and will probably act collectively.

The general consensus of the community is that the Indians are not likely to get directly involved unless there is widespread social upheaval and bloodshed, which is not likely. The most significant damage to US interests of a reimposition of martial law would be the setback to US efforts to push B. toward a stable democratic system of government. The most significant loss to Bangladesh would be the potential damage done to its standing with the world donor community.

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